SOCIAL STUDIES' STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES: TOWARDS REGAINING ITS SEPARATE SUBJECT STATUS IN THE CURRICULUM

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Abstract
Despite the laudable aims of Social Studies and its roles in national development, it seems there are some other interests that are competing with the subject thereby reducing it to the status of a minor subject and not giving it the full autonomy to equip learners with the necessary and required skills for sustainable nation-building.This paper examined the aims of Social Studies, its roles in National development, the challenges confronting the subject and delved more importantly into its strengths and opportunities that make it the most encompassing of all school subjects in the Nigerian curriculum. The paper stressed that Social Studies is significantly relevant to development morals, values and nation building which makes its continuation as a compulsory single subject in the curriculum indispensable. It was therefore recommended among others that Social Studies should not be relegate to an infinitesimal position among other subjects but allowed to regain its status as a separate single core subject in the curriculum.

Keywords: Social Studies, Strengths, Opportunities, Curriculum, Effective citizenship

Introduction

Globally, school subjects are saddled with the responsibility of solving societal problems. In order to solve identified societal problems, the society believes that there is need for both young and old to play their parts. Awareness of the situation of things help people to develop right attitude towards providing lasting solutions to identified problems. One of the subjects that came up in the world after the Second World War was Social Studies which is a problem-based and integrated subject. Its main objective at inception centers on human beings and their interrelationships and relationship with the environment. Social Studies is not merely a subject, but a discipline that operates as a field of study encompassing various subjects such as Economics, Geography, History, Government, Sociology and other subjects relating to human existence.

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (1994), Social Studies is a comprehensive field of study that combines the social sciences and humanities with the aim of fostering civic competence. Social studies is the study of people, how they live, behave, socialize and are organized in groups, the relationship and interaction they have with their physical and social environments (Adeyemi, 2000). These definitions suggest that Social Studies is a subject that studies human beings with problems encountered in their struggle for survival within the environments and how to proffer solutions to such problems in critically creative ways. The subject matter included under the discipline of Social Studies furnishes the essential foundational information required for cultivation of values and formation of well-reasoned perspectives.

Social Studies is reported to have started in the Ohio University, Columbus in the United State of America and the Ayetoro

Comprehensive High School, Old Egbado District of Ogun State, Nigeria. The Nigerian programme was an experimentation of the Ohio State University Social Studies project. Since the experimentation, Social Studies has remained a subject to reckon with in the Nigerian school curriculum. Researchers have justified the need for Social Studies to continue as a single core subject in the curriculum due to its significant aims of developing values, helping individuals to live meaningful and productive lives that describe effective citizenship and helping them to be 'whole' in their natural environments. Social Studies is dynamic in nature. Its dynamism shows in the changes that have reflected in its definitions; changing from the use of generic term 'man' to 'people or humans' (Oluwagbohunmi and Alonge, 2023). In furtherance of attestation to its dynamism, the authors maintained that Social Studies as a multi disciplinary discipline has knowledge, skill and character development as its core objectives with flexible curriculum that makes it amenable and easily receptive to integration of new ideas and emerging areas of knowledge. Suffice to surmise that Social Studies content can change based on life experiences which policy makers and other stakeholders deem essential and significant to be included in its content to make it relevant in the changing world in this digital age.

Some recent definitions through their considerations and submissions have also justified the need for continued existence of Social Studies as a compulsory school subject. Ajiboye (2003) averred that Social Studies is a subject that is concerned with the totality of the realities of 'peoples' existence'. Ojedokun (2020) defined Social Studies as an integrated study of issues derived from the humanities, the social sciences and other areas of study in order to have a holistic understanding of human problems and to proffer probable solutions to them, so that the human can live peaceably with the existing and emerging circumstances in the surrounding physical and social environments.

Objectives and Role of Social Studies in National Development

Social Studies' primary objective is to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively engage as informed and responsible citizens within a pluralistic democratic society. Learners are expected to begin to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills right from the level of basic education. For this reason, each level of education has stated objectives. However, Ojedokun (2002) stated that Social Studies prepares citizens who can perpetuate and improve the society (social) and shape a child by the culture that surrounds him/her (personal education).The expected social goals of Social Studies in Nigeria as reported by Adewuya (2013) are the instilling of social value and skills for active social life into individuals; creation of awareness and understanding of the environment to citizens; enabling citizens to acquire skills necessary for solving societal and environmental problems; encouragement of voluntary participation in social and civic duties among others. Omiyefa (2021) added that the main objective of Social studies curriculum in Nigeria is to develop young people to become responsible citizens through cultivation of good and positive values. According to Ezegbe (1994), the broad aims of Social Studies education generally are to:

1. provide children with an opportunity of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the society in which they live
2. make education functional, and help children develop approaches to, and methods of work that, will allow them to discover relationships and see particular facts and topics as part of a whole.
3. encourage pupils to enquire; discover and think, by providing a variety of content and methods that can appeal to youthful enthusiasms, stimulate the imagination, promote intellectual curiosity, and provide a spur to further investigation
4. develop critical faculties that can be used as a defense against crooked and illegal thinking.
5. help children develop objectivity in reasoning and judgment
6. help children develop the ability to distinguish between facts and opinion, opinion and theory, hypothesis and proof.
7. help children develop confidence in their capabilities by providing a variety of

materials that cater for differing interests among children.

8. help pupils understand and appreciate the importance of others, both in themselves and in their relationship to the society.
9. make children become aware of the ever-changing situations among social phenomena and realities.
10. create situations where children become aware of, and sensitive to the problems of society, as well as the existence of a variety of alternative solutions to them.
11. help pupils develop the ability to interpret and asses issues and events in the society, in their proper perspectives.
12. help pupils develop the spirit of co-operation as well as other desirable values and attitudes

In Mezieobi (1994), roles of Social Studies are highlighted to include:

- The development of National consciousness and commitment as necessary ingredients for nation building.
- The inculcation of social value and skills for active social life
- The development of intellectual skills, knowledge and abilities for better understanding of the immediate and remote environment.
- Developing rational thinking ability for practical social life
- Identifying and solving problems using problem solving techniques
- Promoting value awareness and utilization of some values in tackling dynamic problems in the society.

In addition to these objectives and roles, Social Studies also plays significant role in national development. Obro (2007) claimed that the role of Social Studies in national development are:

1. Good Citizenship: Through the teaching and inculcation of good citizenship, Social Studies help to build citizens who will perform their legal, civic and unsolicited obligations to the nation as a whole.
2. Development of National Consciousness: through Social Studies, citizens of a nation are taught to see themselves first as members of a nation rather than from the perspective of their different tribes, states and region.
3. Creation of Awareness: Social Studies exposes students to the different resources of the country, where they are located, their rational use and conservation for economic development.
4. Knowledge of Significant Development in Human Societies: Knowledge of past events enable the citizens to learn to prevent such happenings in the present, project for future, build a better and trouble free society thereby bringing about national development.
5. Fostering of National Unity: Exposure to other cultures exposes the child to cultural accommodation, high level of tolerance, reduction in religious intolerance and conflicts of various magnitudes to foster national unity
6. Moral Education and Development: Moral education and development are aspects of Social Studies education. No nation attains great heights in national development without a crop of morally responsible citizens who place national pride and dignity over self.

Challenges Confronting the Teaching and Learning of Social Studies

Despite the laudable aims and roles of Social Studies in national development, observation shows that there are some other interests that are competing with the subject thereby reducing it to the status of a minor subject. The first is the introduction of Civic Education into the school curriculum in 2008 by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) followed by introduction of Religion and National Values Education in 2017 and more recently National Value Education (NVE) which now houses Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education as mere themes and not as differed holistic subjects in the school.

Introduction of National Value Education into the Nigerian school curriculum seems to have resulted in significant changes and innovations in the curriculum leading to the omission of several educational topics in the field of Social Studies. This transformation appears to have occurred without due

consideration of the commendable aims, objectives, and future prospects of Social Studies as a single core academic subject. Policy makers have rebranded it as National Value Education, thereby disregarding the fundamental goals and objectives of Social Studies, which include nation building, national integration, cultivation of values and attitudes necessary for responsible citizenship as well as acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable learners to be self-reliant and independent. The new NVE subject (Adedutan, 2020) comprised Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education with the key concepts knitted together to form an integrated thread for the organization of the contents in the new subject for a coherent, whole curriculum. Hence, Social Studies is not given the full autonomy to equip learners with the necessary and required skills for sustainable nation-building. This is because time devoted to teaching Social Studies has been divided to accommodate those other subjects.

The present status of Social Studies in the curriculum appears not encouraging. The situation does not suggest whether Social Studies is strong or weak; whether it provides opportunities for success, and what actually caused its being changed to a theme and merged with other themes that has made it to be disregarded as a single core subject in the curriculum seems to be shrouded in secrecy as it is not very clear (Oladosu,2023).

The policy makers, the NERDC and the Federal Ministry of Education that are saddled with the responsibility of curriculum preparation and Social Studies teachers appear to have different perspectives with reference to the corresponding goals of Social Studies. The policy makers see Social Studies as a theme that can be inconsequentially put under the National Value Education curriculum alongside other themes (Security Education and Civic Education) while the teacher trainers (SOSAN) believe that this is inconsistent and a big error that may constitute a threat to Social Studies as an age long discipline which should shoulder the societal responsibilities of effective citizenship and community development services. Despite the assumed perception of the stakeholders, a study conducted by Adeyemi and Onigiobi (2019) found no significant difference in the Social Studies stakeholders' assessment of achievement of the set goals.

Challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Social Studies today as reported by Falade and Ishola (nd) include the fusion of Social Studies curriculum into another subject as its contents are taught as a theme under the National Value Education, lack of periodic review of the Social Studies curriculum, problem of untrained, inefficient and poorly motivated teachers and the side-lining of Social Studies teachers in curriculum planning. These challenges impede the impact that Social Studies could have on the learners and cause setback to its relevance in the Nigerian school programme. The implication of non review of curriculum is that after a period of time, the curriculum could become obsolete and emerging socio-economic and political problems would not be incorporated into the curriculum.

Another notable challenge is failure of government to include Social Studies in the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria. Jekayinfa (1999), the absence of curriculum integration at the senior secondary level poses a barrier to the complete realization of the goals and objectives of Social Studies; this hindrance prevents learners from acquiring the necessary qualities, such as empathy, rationality, proficient decision-making skills, and active participation, which are essential for becoming responsible citizens in an increasingly intricate and interconnected world. Adeyemi (2020) corroborated this by submitting that as valuable as the subject is to the moral and intellectual development of the child as well as the acquisition of required skills for building the nation, there have been gaps in the Nigeria Social Studies curriculum; the subject is offered in the primary and junior secondary schools in the country but not offered at the senior secondary school level, making it difficult for proper shift from the secondary to the tertiary level of education.

Moreover, NCSS (2009) declared that the subject remains surrounded with lack of transparency, incoherence and contradictions that further confound its problem. Adewuya (2013) and Abdu-Kabir (2014) also affirmed that teachers who are crucial agents in

interpretation and implementation of the curriculum are not involved in curriculum development process in Nigeria. However, what constitutes threat to Social Studies to the extent that the whole subject is now being relegated to a theme in another supposedly compound curriculum has not enjoyed sufficient discourse in educational research and literature. It may be hypothesized that there are cross–border influences that are responsible for the sudden breakdown of Social Studies into three different themes under the National Value Education. If this trend is allowed to continue and the challenges confronting the subject are not tackled, it could make the subject lose its strengths, throw away its opportunities and jeopardise achievement of the main goal of social studies which is development of civic competence in learners.

The Strengths and Opportunities of Social Studies

Having examined the aims of Social Studies, its roles in National development and the challenges confronting the subject, it can be inferred that the strengths and opportunities of the subject are clearly spelt out as embedded in its objectives and roles as discussed above. In the submission of Shamija (2008), the field of Social Studies, when appropriately structured and effectively taught, has the potential to address the challenges encountered by emerging nations such as Nigeria where the norms are fast losing their grips and there are no adequate alternatives to replace them. Adediran and Onifade (2013) were of the view that the broad nature of the Social Studies curriculum makes it an essential school programme that meets the cultural values and moral goals of the society. While supporting this, Abdul Kabir (2014) reiterated that if the tenets (principles of Social Studies) are properly taught, it could help develop positive attitudes of togetherness and cooperation towards a sound and respectable nation through the transmission of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness, justice, and fair play as one's contribution to the development of the nation and the creation of awareness in the learners that discipline is essential for an orderly society. Opoh, Edinyang and Ogbagi (2014) submitted that this partly explains why Social Studies has been given pride of place at all levels of the Nigerian education system. Falade and Ishola (2021) also stressed that Social Studies can be said to be the most encompassing of all school subjects embracing contents from a wide range of issues as they affect man and the environment.

Information from the communiqué issued at the end of SOSAN Conference held in Jos in 2021 indicated that the Social Studies Educationists Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) still believe strongly that Social Studies is commanding respect and it is difficult to defeat, it is still considered strong, reliable and capable of building a sustainable society**.** The association members who are implementers of the curriculum are aware that Social Studies is still taught as a core subject at the Colleges of Education and Universities towards preparation of Social Studies teachers in schools. They also hold the belief that the subject is significantly relevant to nation building which makes its continuation as a compulsory single subject in the curriculum significant and should not be relegated to an infinitesimal position among other subjects.

In his SWOT analysis, Ojedokun (2016) affirmed that Social Studies is a strong school subject with a lot of strengths and opportunities as well as some weaknesses and threats. He identified the strengths and opportunities as shown below:

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
Compulsory subject at primary and Junior secondary schools	Can be utilised to teach about national unity and progress
Runs an integrated curriculum	
Recognised by the National Policy on Education as a compulsory subject	May be taught as a compulsory subject at Senior Secondary level if accorded an appropriate recommendation
Can be learnt relatively easily	
Has an objective that looks somewhat identical with national philosophy of Nigerian education	May serve as a perfect substitute or match for other social science subjects
Not involving (with unidentifiable) mathematical/statistical concept to pose problem for any learner	Can educate for sustainability if well transformed
Discusses virtual daily experiences of learner	Carries concept that can be reviewed to accommodate other concepts supporting ecological living
Has close link with people's culture	
Offered as a teacher education course	
Internationally recognised as a discipline that studies human beings operating in the multifaceted environment	May be amenable to some of the methods that are often used in Education for Sustainability (EfS)

Source: Ojedokun (2016)

The Federal government recognised the role of social studies as a subject capable of assisting in the realization of the national objectives of education when National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) prescribed it as a core subject in the primary and junior secondary schools and as an elective at the senior secondary school. Ifegbesan, Lawal and Rampedi (2017) described Social Studies as a way of life that strives to equip the young learners with such knowledge, values, and skills through its rich and versatile contents and diverse but unique methods.In addition to their submission, the authors averred that 'lecturers must consciously emphasize sustainability and sustainable development goals and values inherent in the topics' to buttress the fact that Social Studies is the most relevant and appropriate subject that can be used as a tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDs)just as Ojedokun (2016) stressed the importance of main streaming education for sustainability into the Nigerian Social Studies teacher education programme. From the foregoing, it must be noted that the argument has been in support of the significance of Social Studies being given its rightful place as a reputable and compulsory single/separate subject in Nigerian curriculum.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that Social Studies as a school subject possesses some degree of strengths and full of opportunities to exist as a separate core subject in the Nigerian curriculum.

Recommendations

Based on the above submission, the following recommendations are made:

1. The policy makers should allow only the Social Studies professionals to prepare Social Studies curriculum at all levels of education.
2. The Social Studies professional body should be allowed to review the curriculum to align with factual daily needs of learners and the society.
3. Social Studies should regain its status as a separate single core subject in the curriculum
4. Social Studies should be incorporated into the Senior Secondary School Curriculum to allow proper shift to tertiary education.

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